

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS**

April 1, 2021

8:05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky, Chair
Representative Zack Fields
Representative Geran Tarr
Representative Mike Cronk

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Dan Ortiz

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 123

"An Act providing for state recognition of federally recognized tribes; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED HB 123 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 123

SHORT TITLE: STATE RECOGNITION OF TRIBES

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) ZULKOSKY

03/03/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/03/21	(H)	TRB, STA
03/30/21	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
03/30/21	(H)	Heard & Held
03/30/21	(H)	MINUTE (TRB)
04/01/21	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

RICHARD PETERSON, President and CEO
Central Council Tlingit and Haida
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During invited testimony, offered opening remarks and testimony in support of HB 123.

VIVIAN KORTHUIS, Chief Executive Officer
Association of Village Council Presidents

Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During invited testimony, offered remarks in support of HB 123.

ELIZABETH MEDICINE CROW, President and CEO

First Alaskans Institute

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During invited testimony, spoke in support of HB 123.

CHARLES DEGNAN

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

BOB SAM

Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

COURTENAY CARTY, Tribal Administrator

Dillingham Curyung Tribe

Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

GLORIA SIMEON

Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

FRANK KATCHATAG, President

Native Village of Unalakleet

Unalakleet, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

GABE CANFIELD

Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

JOEL JACKSON, President

Organized Village of Kenai

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

BRUCE ERVIN

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

JONES HOTCH

Our Tribal Council

Klukwan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

BROOKE WOODS

Rampart, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

KENDRA ZAMZOW

Chickaloon, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

WANDA CULP

Hoonah, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in limited support of HB 123.

CARRIE STEVENS

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

DIANA ZIRUL

Kenaitze Tribal Council

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

FRANCIS DEGNAN

Unalakleet, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

LORI WOLF

Foraker Group

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

WAYNE MORGAN

Chief, Aniak Tribe

Aniak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

RHONDA PITKA

Chief, Village of Beaver

City & State

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 123.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:05:33 AM](#)

CHAIR TIFFANY ZULKOSKY called the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. Representatives Cronk, Tarr, Fields and Zulkosky were present at the call to order.

HB 123-STATE RECOGNITION OF TRIBES

[8:06:09 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 123, "An Act providing for state recognition of federally recognized tribes; and providing for an effective date."

[8:06:38 AM](#)

RICHARD PETERSON, President and CEO, Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Tlingit and Haida), testified in support of HB 123. Shared he was a lifelong Alaskan who could trace his lineage back thousands of years, and that he did not feel this made him any better than any Alaskan who moved here; just that he had a different history. He shared Tlingit and Haida had more than 32 thousand members within the indigenous territory of Southeast Alaska, the United States (US), and the world. Tlingit and Haida were listed on the federal register issued every year, were established by an act of Congress, and administered about \$32m in federal, state, and private funding through grants, compacts, contracts, and direct appropriations per year, he stated. Alaska was home to 229 federally recognized tribes; there were 573 federally recognized tribes throughout the US, he pointed out. Recognition was long overdue, he stated, as it was time to move on from challenging Native Alaskans' existence, and as a matter of policy it was what made sense: HB 123 would recognize tribes' inherent authority to serve their own citizens, he said. Tribes brought in and saved the state hundreds of millions of dollars, he said, and healthy tribes made healthy communities, he added, noting the response to the COVID-19 pandemic by tribal healthcare as a prime example of the way tribes have taken care of the community. He shared tribes had a complex history that needed to be recognized, as even conversations were still hollow without due recognition.

[8:14:17 AM](#)

VIVIAN KORTHUIS, Chief Executive Officer, Association of Village Council Presidents, testified in support of HB 123. She shared

Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) was the largest tribal consortium in the US with 56 federally recognized tribes as members - a quarter of tribes in Alaska and an eighth of the tribes in US - reside in 48 villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. She shared AVCP provided its social services, culturally relevant programming, and advocacy for tribes and tribal members of the Y-K Delta through partnerships with tribes, with the federal government, and with other organizations, she shared. The State of Alaska was settled by tribes, and, as such, in recognizing AVCP, the State of Alaska would not be giving a benefit AVCP does not already have but would gain the benefit of having tribes as a partner. She reiterated tribes already had experience partnering with the federal government, and that a partnership would be especially beneficial for Rural Alaska and the children who resided there. Working with the tribes by way of HB 123 has the potential to be a watershed moment, she put forth.

[8:21:21 AM](#)

ELIZABETH MEDICINE CROW, President and CEO, First Alaskans Institute, testified in support of HB 123. Shared tribes not only had responsibilities to each other, but complex protocols, ceremonies, structures, processes and systems by which alignment was kept and from which Alaskans were able to steward behavior toward abundance and celebrate diversity, one of Alaskans' biggest strengths that ought to be harnessed, she put forth. Tribal, state, and federal governments - all sovereigns - ought to represent three chances Alaskans had to work together respectfully, she emphasized. People in Alaska have conflated distinctions, putting them all in the racial category, she shared, but it is important for all Alaskans to understand the political side as well. It is through the inherent sovereignty harnessed by tribal government change can be made. Transformation can happen, she urged; intervention could even save money, she put forth, adding opportunities would remain unsupported were HB 123 not to be passed. Tribal power and state power needed to work together in this moment, she reiterated.

[8:30:48 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY opened public testimony on HB 123.

[8:31:12 AM](#)

CHARLES DEGNAN testified in support of HB 123. As a tribal member, Alaskan, and US citizen, Mr. Degnan shared HB 123 offered an opportunity for everyone to work together. Historically tribes have always been willing to work together, he offered.

[8:32:56 AM](#)

BOB SAM testified in support of HB 123. A tribal member and Alaskan, Mr. Sam worked to restore cemeteries. He offered the restoration of oftentimes desecrated and always sacred sites required working together with tribal governments.

[8:35:11 AM](#)

COURTENAY CARTY, Tribal Administrator, Dillingham Curyung Tribe, testified in support of HB 123. Ms. Carty shared HB 123 would strengthen relationships throughout the state.

[8:36:10 AM](#)

GLORIA SIMEON testified in support of HB 123. Offered she was surprised to see HB 123 as tribes had been recognized in the 1990s; she said she thought this had already been accepted and barriers torn down. She stated HB 123 was long overdue, as denying tribes their rights served no one, and there was so much work to do.

[8:39:07 AM](#)

FRANK KATCHATAG, President, Native Village of Unalakleet, testified in support of HB 123.

[8:40:05 AM](#)

GABE CANFIELD testified in support of HB 123. As a multigenerational Alaskan attending Dartmouth College, Ms. Canfield named her ancestors' courage and strength, teaching of Native values, and reciprocity of care and community, as the secret to her success. Alaskans needed to lift each other up, she stated.

[8:42:13 AM](#)

JOEL JACKSON, President, Organized Village of Kake, testified in support of HB 123. Shared state recognition of tribes would be a beneficial partnership for both entities and could improve the

lives of all Alaskans. Tribal members ought not to be asked to relinquish sovereignty, especially with tribal health assisting the state in COVID-19 vaccine rollout, he put forth.

[8:45:21 AM](#)

BRUCE ERVIN testified in support of HB 123. Tribal member and Alaskan shared it was important for future generations to show support to all Alaskans by recognizing tribal sovereignty. Alaskan tribes have been disenfranchised for too long, he shared.

[8:47:04 AM](#)

JONES HOTCH testified in support of HB 123. Expressed it was ironic tribes were recognized by the federal government but not by the state. He stated it was an historic moment.

[8:48:46 AM](#)

BROOKE WOODS testified in support of HB 123. Shared support of HB 123 meant the establishment of good governance in Alaska, which was lagging in terms of good governance, she shared. Tribal members were working diligently to improve the state for all people, she said.

[8:52:43 AM](#)

KENDRA ZAMZOW testified in support of HB 123. A 30-year Alaskan, she shared even those "new" to Alaska were invested in lifting those who have stewarded the land since time immemorial.

[8:53:31 AM](#)

WANDA CULP testified in limited support of HB 123. Ms. Culp shared Alaska Natives have never been land-restricted but had special relationships with the land and water and should not be limited from resources as the State tried to do. She urged utilization, not limiting; it was not up to the State to pick and choose what it would recognize under federal law, she said.

[8:56:14 AM](#)

CARRIE STEVENS testified in support of HB 123. Tribal Governance faculty at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Ms. Stevens shared Alaska existed because of tribal governance. There was no disputing knowledge and wisdom of tribes, she

added, expressing deep gratitude for tribes' role in COVID-19 vaccine rollout. Alaska could be a role model but was instead a laughingstock, she pointed out, urging passage of HB 123.

[9:00:30 AM](#)

DIANA ZIRUL testified in support of HB 123, giving as an example of success tribal health's role in the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. Water and sanitation deficiencies could use a strong partnership to tackle them, she pointed out as an example of how much work there was to be done.

[9:04:13 AM](#)

FRANCIS DEGNAN testified in support of HB 123, giving as examples deep cultural tradition and heritage to strengthen her reason for support.

[9:07:08 AM](#)

LORI WOLF testified in support of HB 123 on behalf of the Foraker Group, a non-profit serving Alaska. Foraker specified urban, rural, Native, and non-Native peoples alike fully supported Alaska's First People, she said. "Stronger and better to serve together" was the thrust of her refrain in support for HB 123.

[9:08:59 AM](#)

WAYNE MORGAN, Chief, Aniak Tribe, testified in support of HB 123. Representing 600 tribal members, Mr. Morgan said he was interested in improving issues such as law enforcement. Belief of sovereignty would still reign even if HB 123 were not to pass, but its passage would strengthen Alaska, he said.

[9:12:31 AM](#)

RHONDA PITKA, Chief, Village of Beaver, testified in support of HB 123. She pointed out local governance had been pressed into action to "combat" the lack of federal governance. State support would only make everything better and stronger in terms of policy and programs, she said.

[9:14:30 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY closed public testimony on HB 123.

9:15:24 AM

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS moved to report HB 123 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying zero fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 123 was reported out of the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs.

9:16:06 AM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 9:16 a.m.